

THE SUMMER SCHOOL OF CATHOLIC ACTION - 1941

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND COOPERATIVES

IV.

HOW TO ORGANIZE AND MANAGE COOPERATIVES
IN PARISH AND SCHOOL

Thursday, 2:40 p.m.

Father McDonald

The most necessary, essential and ultimately the most practical first step towards the organization of any cooperative enterprise is study. There is no hope of enduring success unless all the prospective members of a cooperative association educate themselves in the spirit of cooperation. They must acquaint themselves with the fundamental principles and methods of cooperation, the history of the Movement, including both its failures and successes, and a detailed study of all the factors involved in that particular type of cooperative association which the group may, after study, determine to organize.

But while such study is an absolute prerequisite to successful organization and must remain a constant and regular part of the program after organization, it is not a difficult or involved process that should frighten one away.

Because education is the foundation upon which sound cooperative organization, management, growth and development must be founded, cooperative education is the main topic for our present consideration.

We shall therefore suggest a program of education and sketch in broad outline the lines along which such a program might proceed.

N. B. Until such time as the educational leaders see fit to include a systematic study of cooperatives in the curricula of our school systems we shall have to be content to adapt adult educational methods to cooperative study.

About the most effective method of adult education is the study or discussion club method. This method is admirably adapted to this for, like cooperatives themselves, the discussion club technique is itself a kind of self-help method.

The first step, therefore, for groups whether of parish or school is to form one or several discussion clubs of those interested in organizing a cooperative. Detailed directions on the formation, organization, and technique of discussion clubs are available from many sources, including our own "Discussion Club Handbook."

Presuming a previous acquaintance with the mechanics of discussion club procedure the following for such a club is recommended:

Recommended Course of Studies on Consumer Cooperatives for Discussion Club Groups:

1. Study the necessity and value of education in cooperation in order to convince members that success cannot be expected without it.

Some reasons for this study:

- a) Democracy depends on the education of the people. To govern themselves the people must have an intelligent grasp of their rights, duties and responsibilities, and of all the issues involved in government. Consumers' Cooperation is democracy applied to the economic order. Unless the people are educated to the fuller appreciation of their economic responsibilities, duties and rights they cannot be expected to intelligently conduct their economic affairs. Without education neither political or economic democracy can be maintained. Ignorance on the part of the peoples and the apathy that ignorance breeds makes people the easy prey of tyrants in the political order and exploiters in the economic order.

b) Why bungle things? No man attempts to do what he knows nothing about. Cooperation can progress no faster than the people can be trained to understand it and administer its business. In working out a different social method, there must be much study and planning. We must see what is wrong in the old system, and realize what we are aiming at in the new; and we must know the means that are necessary (and have been successful) for reaching that new goal. Since the principles of cooperation are opposed to privilege, there is double need of education. If the matter can be made plain, if the people can finally see clearly, cooperation may yet be seized upon by all mankind. Naturally there has been some bungling in the past. Not a few farmers have been duped into joining up with "Cooperatives" which were cooperatives in name only. Ignorance of genuine cooperation made such mistakes possible. Are these farmers the wiser for such mistakes. Are they going to damn all "Cooperatives" -- including the genuine, Rochdale Cooperative -- just because they MIGHT be fooled again? just because they WON'T inquire?

c) What do the experts say? The leaders in the Cooperative Movement all admit that the chief reason for the slow progress of cooperation is the lack of education in the cooperative spirit and methods. They also say that the chief initial step toward real progress is education - education in the spirit and methods of cooperation. Education points out the reasons for failure in the past, and shows the sources of success for the future. The understanding and loyalty of the members of cooperative organizations depend much upon their appreciation of the principles and practices of cooperation. The necessity of education along cooperative lines is also brought home very strongly by the fact that where "high-pressure propaganda and salesmanship" were used to accelerate the spread of cooperatives, such cooperatives nearly always proved failures - simply because the members had not had sufficient time to educate themselves up to the true spirit of cooperation.

2. Next study the need for cooperatives from considerations purely economic.

- a) Select for study and discussion the most obvious abuses and evils which demand remedies. Such evils and abuses were indicated in the first day's session. Make a more thorough analysis of the evils and abuses touched upon there. (1st day- page 2-2nd heading.).
- b) Study and discuss various remedies other than cooperatives that aim at the reform or complete overthrow of our present system -- communism, totalitarianism, New Deal legislation.
- c) Study the cooperative way in the light of its possibilities to remedy most of the economic evils and abuses that exist. To do this take the Rochdale principles one by one and see what particular abuse or evil each principle aims to correct. Draw your conclusions impartially and objectively. Consider the Rochdale principles first in themselves and secondly in the actual results achieved by means of them in Great Britain, Scandinavia, Nova Scotia and the United States - in all departments of economic endeavor whether in the field of production, distribution, consumption or service.

3. Following the study of the need of cooperatives from the purely economic viewpoint, consider whether they are needed to put Christ's teachings into business methods and practices.

- a) To do this, again analyze each Rochdale principle to see how each one squares up with Christian dogma, philosophy and ethics.

b) Direct your studies above all to the realization of the spirit of cooperation. True cooperators must learn that though the system is economically sound and practical it will never fully succeed if it is entered into as a means to save a few cents, increase purchasing power, etc. The spirit of cooperation is essential to every member, a spirit which appreciates its great ideals, its transcendent spiritual values, its tremendous social significance, its power for the common welfare, its part in the establishment of Christ's Kingdom of Justice and Charity. The spirit that makes men "Masters of Their Own Destiny." That makes them free economically, self-helping and self-respecting.

4. Study the relation of cooperatives to the preservation of democracy. Without economic democracy, political democracy is a freak - a half-formed monster.

5. Study and know the answer to the questions, objections, difficulties that cooperatives have to face.

(After some such course on the need for cooperation we can then think of some type of cooperative we in particular need and would like to organize. So the study club proceeds from generalities to specifics.)

6. Make a survey of the particular needs of your parish or school. A survey of needs in a parish or school is bound to reveal opportunities for a cooperative of some kind, i.e.:

A credit union
A cooperative library
A filling station
Maternity guild
Buying club for seasonal items
Dining club.

Unless a need is there and recognized as such, and a cooperative association could supply that need, an attempt to start would be futile. Don't try it.

But if a need is recognized, the study club now turns its energies to the specific study of how to organize and manage a cooperative enterprise.

The outline we submit here gives in detail how to organize a cooperative buying club, in this particular instance a buying club for silk stockings. The methods advocated here apply to any kind of buying club.

Furthermore, the principles and methods by which a buying club is organized can easily be adapted to a more ambitious cooperative enterprise, such as a cooperative store.

Hence we shall use "Organization and Management of a Cooperative Enterprise in a School" as a model for several different types of cooperatives.

Highly recommended and practically indispensable to any group planning a cooperative enterprise is Bulletin #598, issued by the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (Price 10¢). By all means write for this to the Superintendent of Documents, Washington D.C. The above document is excellent material for study groups even if they do not intend to actually organize a cooperative.

For a bibliography of material for the recommended course of studies on consumers' cooperatives for discussion club groups use the one which THE QUEEN'S WORK supplies, and note the references given in "Some Reasons Why Cooperatives Should Be Formed in Catholic Parishes and Schools," in Monday's outline.